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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY
OFFICE OF CURRENT INTELLIGENCE
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COMMENT ON JAPANESE POLITICAL CRISIS

The fall of the Yoshida government culminates a five month period of instability following the October elections, during which the regime has been constantly at the mercy of dissidents within the Prime Minister's Liberal Party. The government has already decided to dissolve the Diet and hold new elections on 19 April, rather than to form a Cabinet under new leadership. The composition of the next Diet is likely to remain conservative, with a generally pro-Western orientation.

With the Liberal Party holding only a majority of 12 seats in the Diet, it was primarily Yoshida's threat of new elections, for which neither the Opposition nor the disaffected Liberals were ready, that enabled him to survive this long. There was also some reluctance on the part of the dissident Liberals to split the party. The crisis came to a head on 2 March when a small group of Liberals, under the leadership of Agriculture and Forestry Minister Hirokawa, abstained on a vote of censure against Yoshida for derogatory remarks in a Diet committee meeting. Yoshida retaliated by removing Hirokawa from the Cabinet and requesting his expulsion from the party. Last minute efforts by party leaders to get Hirokawa's support in the no-confidence vote in exchange for his remaining in the party apparently did not succeed.

The basis of the factional dispute within the Liberal Party has been a constantly shifting struggle for power between the pre-war and post-war leaders and between the bureaucrats and the political leaders. There has also been considerable party discontent over Yoshida's "dictatorial" methods and his alleged subservience to the U. S.

Although there may be some shift of popular support toward the Socialists as a result of the government's recent instability, a new conservative parliament seems assured, especially since the shortness of campaign time and the lack of opposition party finances, will tend to favor the present incumbents.

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Although it would not be in keeping with Yoshida's character to retire gracefully from the scene, it is unlikely that he will be able to win sufficient support to regain the premiership. A realignment of conservative political forces is probable, but it is unlikely that any of the new conservative groups will emerge in control of the new parliament. The most likely outcome will be a conservative coalition government headed either by Shigemitsu of the Progressive Party or Hatoyama of the Liberals. A government under either of these men would still continue Japan's western orientation and would take a more positive attitude toward rearmament. It would be less likely, however, to resist current pressures for a closer economic relationship with Communist China, and might deemphasize, somewhat, its relations with the United States.